

# Students walk out for transgender rights and respect

by staffer Ivonee Morales

Students stood out in protest on Tuesday, Nov. 20, against the Trump administration's decision to take away protection given to transgender people under Title IX.

"I believe in our rights and I believe that we have to speak out on things that are happening in our country," senior Jaeza Robertson said.

This event was planned by the Gay-Straight Alliance on Transgender Remembrance Day, a day dedicated to remembering victims of anti-transgender violence. The two main leaders of this event were seniors Emily Hilderbrand and Avery Fox.

Fox gathered support and created artwork. Hilderbrand helped rally support on social media, but both helped plan the event with the help of the GSA club.

"For me, this was my chance to be a voice, not just for myself but for the



Seniors Jenna Grayce, Avery Fox, Gisselle Gonzalez-Sanchez and Lilyanna Law hold up a sign displaying the message "respect my existence or expect my resistance," at the recent GSA walkout. "We are who we are and nothing is going to change that," Fox said.

kids that feel like they can't speak up for themselves or can't stand out for themselves," Fox said. "That even if they can't speak up, that there are people out there willing to speak out for them."

The walkout was student planned and organized.

"We're not allowed to organize a walkout or be part of a walkout," assistant principal Chad Valadez said, referring to policies faculty must follow.

Even though the school administration could not participate or help plan the event, they did come out with the resource officers to ensure the safety of the students protesting.

"We had a much bigger turnout than what we were anticipating which is amazing," Hilderbrand said. "So the hardest part was worrying if people were going to come."

Since this is a student-held event, the GSA had to plan this event on its own time during and after school. They couldn't talk to students during class about the event or post something promoting the event in the official Oak Park social media pages. However, students made sure to promote the event on their social media and encourage students to come out for support.

"We are hoping that people who might've felt scared have a voice and that they feel empowered to be who they are and that they are worthy of respect and to be treated like a human being," Hilderbrand said.

As of March 2017, 19 states, the



Freshman Kallista Ashton listens to the speakers while showing off their true colors with face paint. (photo credits Faith Guinnip)

District of Columbia and more than 200 municipalities in the United States have anti-discrimination laws that allow transgender people to use public restrooms corresponding to their gender identity, according to the National Center for Transgender Equality.

"The biggest issue is people believing that I don't belong in certain spaces, as a trans man I've used male restrooms and that's where I'm supposed to be, and people have a problem with it," Fox said. "I've had instances here at Oak Park where they have said something to me and wanted to correct my behavior."

In recent years the school district and its students have shown support towards transgender and non-binary students despite being in a conservative state like Missouri. In 2015, Oak Park made national news when students crowned a transgender Homecoming Queen, the first high school in the country to do so. In 2018, the North Kansas City School District built gender-neutral restrooms in several of its new and renovated schools.

What the students want to achieve with this movement will have a ripple effect and encourage students from other schools to do the same to stand up for transgender rights.

"We won't be erased," Fox said.